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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how writing groups function in a multilingual university classroom, the kinds of responses students in such groups give one another, and how students respond to peers' suggestions about writing. Subjects were 11 students of varied linguistic background in a freshman composition class. Data were gathered over 10 weeks through observation, analysis of student writing samples, student interviews, and field notes of casual conversations and ancillary reactions. Results suggest both positive and negative aspects of peer response techniques. The groups helped students respond to their own writing as they sensed audience needs, and students talked to explore and enlarge understanding of their own writing. Limitations included students' reluctance to offer negative criticism, tendency to drift away from appropriate tasks, potential for falling prey to inaccurate or bad advice, exaggerated emphasis on mechanics over content, and overlooking problems in the papers. Students inexperienced in peer response groups were uncertain of their role. In some cases, native-speakers were condescending or dismissive of limited-English-proficient students' needs. It is concluded that the data raise concerns about authority, rules, roles, and relationships that must be addressed if response groups are to function effectively in a linguistically diverse classroom. Contains 31 references. (MSE)

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When They Don't All Speak English: Addressing Writing Problems in Multilingual Peer Response Groups

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When They Don't All Speak English: Addressing Writing Problems in Multilingual Peer Response Groups

Over the last several years, awareness of the potential of collaborative learning, in particular for writing, has increased. In writing classes, collaborative techniques such as peer response groups have become commonplace in native language (L_1) classes and are increasingly accepted in English as a second language (ESL) instruction. Theoretically, small groups offer opportunities for active learning and real conversation (Nystrand, 1986). Nonetheless, although a number of theorists share the assumption that the writing process is supported by having students work together to provide one another with feedback on writing, Freedman, Greenleaf, & Sperling's 1987 survey of 560 writing teachers and 715 secondary students points out that practitioners and students alike are divided about the efficacy of the small-group approach. Writing teachers have little notion about what to expect when they group students together. Indeed, few explanations have been posited for why groups work when they do, or what causes their failures. Thus, although the use of peer groups has assumed an important place in educational practice, a number of questions remain about collaborative learning groups in writing classrooms (Dipardo & Freedman, 1987).

To conceptualize conditions under which peer response groups can be most productive for ESL writers, research must focus on the processes these writers use when faced with having to identify problems and propose solutions to problems in their own texts and in the texts of their L_1 peers. The purpose of this study was to present a detailed look at problem identification and resolution strategies employed by writers in multilingual peer response groups by exploring actual patterns of communication during peer response sessions to describe ways students identify and resolve writing problems within a group context. Because little research exists examining what actually occurs in ESL writing response groups, a number of questions persist regarding the functioning of groups within ESL classrooms in general and within bilingual and multilingual classrooms in particular. Therefore, this study explored the following questions:

1. How do writing groups function in a multilingual classroom, and what kinds of responses do students in such groups give to and receive from one another?

2. Based upon the suggestions of their peers, do students make changes in written products, and if they do, how do they determine which suggestions to accept and which to reject?

The strong theoretical rationale for the use of groups and their popularity in practice coupled with conflicting research findings make studies of this kind essential to understanding the potential for peer response groups in the teaching and learning of writing in multilingual classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

Hairston (1982) uses the term "paradigm shift" to describe the diversion of writing instructional focus from written products to writing processes. Key features of the new paradigm, according to Hairston, include focus on writing as a process, with instruction aimed at the process; teaching strategies for discovery and invention; emphasis on rhetorical principles of audience, purpose, and occasion; treatment of prewriting, writing, and revising as recursive, connected processes; and holism, involving intuition as well as reasoning. Careful consideration of Hairston's list begins to suggest several ways in which small-group approach in classrooms can support such a paradigm shift.

First, groups present a convenient way into individuals' writing processes. Research highlights the importance of allowing students time for thinking about topics and opportunities for revision (Freedman, 1987; Harris & Silva, 1993) as well as occasions to receive response to writing along the path of the expanded writing process not just at the time when the writing is seen as a *fait accompli*. Second, as practitioners shift attention to process, they have become more aware of the importance of audience and purpose (Dipardo & Freedman, 1987). Response groups theoretically provide a convenient structure for underscoring the writer's sense of audience and expanding the audience to which students write (Freedman, 1987). Finally, new understandings of the teaching and learning of writing emphasize the importance of social interaction to language learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotskian Support for Group Work

As one considers how the use of peer groups in writing classrooms supports the goals of the paradigm shift from emphasis on written product to writing process, perhaps even more significant are new understandings of the role of social interaction in the teaching and learning of writing. Increasingly, researchers have investigated ways in which students' conversations bring together cognition and social aspects of language learning (Cazden, 1986). The close correspondence suggested by Vygotskian theory between the nature of social interaction and learning that occurs in groups propounds a need for careful analysis of the internal workings of groups. In classrooms,

peer groups can increase students' social interactions and potential for helping one another acquire written language.

Toward a Social-Cognitive Theory

Alleging that studies of classroom contexts are in danger of being separated from studies of cognitive processes, Freedman, Dyson, Flower, and Chafe (1987) argue for an approach to studying writing that integrates research on social context with research on cognition. First of all, research behind the conception of writing as a social and cognitive process will view learning to write not simply as skill acquisition, but the entrance into discourse communities which have their own rules and expectations. Second, since understandings of the influence of social roles, student interactions, and social and cultural environments on language learning now exists, research that takes a social-cognitive view of writing will consider both cognition and context and how they interact, resulting in a sense of writing as a product and process within its social context.

The Literature

Despite their popularity in practice, response groups have as yet been the subject of relatively few studies. Clearly, organizing response groups in writing classrooms is a complex undertaking. Further, the little available research presents conflicting findings as to the efficacy of small groups in general, creating a pedagogical dilemma for teachers and researchers alike.

Danis (1982) presents data from six peer-response groups in a college writing workshop in which the instructor assigned groups, attempting to balance weak and strong writers. Analysis of tape-recorded discussions revealed that the presence of peers provided students with opportunities to reflect on their work with increased objectivity. Furthermore, students developed the ability to anticipate potential trouble areas in their own writing, prior to peer response. That is, they began to anticipate their audience, developing a sensitivity to the possibilities of their texts, a finding also reported by Nystrand (1986). The results of this study not only bear testimony to the value of peer response, however, but to the limitations frequently associated with small-group approach as well. For example, Danis notes a reluctance among group members to offer negative criticism. In addition, she cites tendencies for groups to drift from the task at hand, spending too much time on minor weaknesses, giving inaccurate advice, or overlooking important problems altogether. Further, Danis suggests that writers are not sure of their role in the peer-response process, whether they should sit and listen or constantly interrupt others and defend themselves.

Responding to over 100 taped group sessions over five years, George (1984) observed similar limitations, noting that some groups failed to interact successfully and much of what was said was lost because writers failed to assimilate suggestions. Harris (1992) echoes Danis's and George's observations of the problems of effective group interaction, noting, however, that groups become more proficient as they practice response and eventually learn to function as a group.

Gere (1982), Gere and Stevens (1985), and Gere and Abbott (1985) compare language in writing groups modeled on Elbow's (1973) "teacherless" writing class across fifth-, eighth-, and eleventh-grade levels. Authors read their drafts aloud in groups, with group members listening the first time and taking notes the second. Oral response was offered after the second reading. The researchers recorded and later transcribed the group sessions, analyzing the kind of talk that occurred. Gere's results indicated that group responses were directed to the writing and were largely informative, providing the writer with suggestions about how a composition could be changed and improved. Revised papers revealed those changes. Similarly, Gere and Stevens conclude that the most commonly occurring kind of talk "informs" group participants about the content of the writing being discussed, suggesting that response groups remain substantially on task. Further, Gere and Stevens endorse peer response groups as a convenient structure for helping students develop a sense of audience and for writing to broader audiences than the teacher. They argue that students' comments are more attentive to writers' intended meanings than are the written comments offered by teachers, who tend to try to conform student texts to some preconceived notion of "good writing" (p. 101). Gere and Stevens claim that student response is more specific, richer, and more varied than teacher feedback alone. Gere and Abbott examined the language of writing groups to determine what students say about one another's work. They suggest that the grade level of group members has some effect on discussions, with younger students attending more to content and older students attending more to form.

Nystrand (1986) studied the effectiveness of peer review in college freshman writing instruction in both studio and non-studio classes. He examined the work of 250 students in 13 classes over a period of three years, discussing both the interactional dynamics and context of the groups examined. Nystrand determined that studio students made significantly more progress than did non-studio counterparts, partly due to differences in the ways they learned to revise writing. Further, he reports that studio students' attitudes became increasingly positive. Nystrand

concludes that the composing strategies writers take from their groups emerge largely from the social interaction of peer review. Thus, Nystrand sees peer review not as simply a teaching method, but as creating an environment similar to the social context of initial language acquisition, where the learner has the opportunity to test continuously the possibilities of written text. While Nystrand assures that the students in these studies were average college freshmen and few, if any, were outstanding writers, it is important to note that participants were not required to take the courses in the study. There was, therefore, a notable absence of remedial writers in the study.

Contradicting Nystrand's enthusiastic support of peer response, Newkirk (1984) finds student responses lacking in several ways. In a smaller scale study, Newkirk determined that, first, students were more tolerant of underdeveloped prose, willing to fill in missing elaboration as they read. Second, students were willing to reward a poor attempt at extended metaphor on the premise that their teacher would be impressed with that sort of thing. Finally, Newkirk found that personal opinion interfered with students' abilities to help writers better express themselves. He concludes that writing for their peers may not give students the best preparation for academic writing. Although Newkirk's study is limited in size and in failure to consider the context and internal dynamics of the groups themselves, this study raises sufficient contradiction to what Gere and Nystrand report to warrant attention.

In an ethnographic study of two ninth-grade writing classes, Freedman (1987) examines ways peer groups function within two contrasting but generally successful classroom environments. Results of Freedman's study reinforce other findings regarding the reluctance of students to engage in talk involving evaluation of another student's writing. While on the positive side, groups helped students respond to their own work, Freedman's findings indicate that when students, on their own, ask for help from peers, peers rarely give it. Contrary to Gere and Abbott's (1985) data, the students in this study rarely discussed real writing problems and, further, resisted teacher-directed response on dittoed response sheets. Freedman concludes that groups will work differently from class to class. In short, while she suggests that there are many reasons to use response groups, Freedman also submits that as much can go wrong with such groups as can go right.

Writing and ESL Students

Considering the increasing numbers of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to ignore the rapidly changing populations in

today's schools. Nowhere is the Multicultural makeup and linguistic diversity of American society demonstrated more clearly than in the nation's classrooms. The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education predicts the number of people from non-English speaking households will increase from 33 million in 1987 to nearly 40 million by the year 2000 (Dillard, 1993). Sadly, it is estimated that two-thirds of limited-English-speaking students do not receive the language assistance they need in order to succeed in their academic and intellectual development (Dyson & Freedman, 1991). Further problematic, in many schools, as a matter of policy, in order to exit from an ESL track to mainstream classes, students must demonstrate proficiency in writing conventionally-correct essays. Yet, there is little understanding among educators about how writing ability in a second language develops or what instructional strategies should be used in order to bring about this development (Dyson & Freedman, 1991).

While research on writing in a second language is sketchy, the available research seems to suggest the utilization, with ESL students, of a writing process approach designed for writing to occur in contexts where language itself is used for thought and problem solving (Diaz, 1989). Among these methods are collaborative learning about writing and peer response groups.

Observing superior writing gains among ESL students in a process class compared with those in a traditional class, Ammon (1985) asserts that inexperienced ESL writers must develop new procedures for drawing on their communicative competence and knowledge to communicate effectively in writing, an assertion supported by the use of peer response groups in writing instruction. In a classroom study investigating the use of process writing techniques with college ESL writers and examining both context and student interaction, Diaz (1986) determined that ESL students benefited from expanded audiences for their writing. Similarly, Zamel (1983) concludes that teachers should not be students' only readers. Moreover, Zamel advises that class time should include collaborative activities, toward creating a community of writers whose members comment about ideas in writing, understand audience needs, and apply these skills to their own writing.

METHOD

This study used ethnographic methods and techniques because of their appropriateness when studying difficult to control processes, such as group interactions. Descriptive data were collected over ten weeks. The investigation involved the following tasks: (a) collecting video and audiotapes of both peer response and whole class sessions; (b) collecting student writing, including response

journals, in-class and out of class writing; (c) interviewing individual students in order to clarify instructor understandings of group dynamics; and (d) keeping teacher/researcher field notes of casual conversations and ancillary reactions to peer response sessions.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of a summer term Freshman Composition class at a small private Mid-South university. The university's 1200 member student body is approximately 15% African American; 82% Caucasian; 3% Hispanic, Native American, and Asian American; and 5% foreign nationals. The class was comprised of five Japanese students, one International student from Spain, one Cuban-American student, and four Caucasian American students, one of whom did not finish summer school.

Data Collection

The participating class met for 90 minutes each day, Monday through Friday, for two five-week sessions. During the ten weeks of observation, four hours of videotape and eight 60-minute audiotape recordings of peer response sessions were collected. Film and audio-recording have a long history in anthropology. Perhaps the most important strength of these tools is their ability to capture phenomena objectively (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). These tools were valuable for both discovery and validation. Film documented nonverbal behavior and communication that would not have been visible on audio- tapes. The audio-tapes preserved the communication patterns and interactions that occurred in the absence of the researcher, which, in this study, was also the teacher. Thus, talk which might not have occurred in the teacher's presence as well as interactions the teacher was unavailable to observe were recorded for later analysis. While film and audio tapes have certain weaknesses and limitations, precautions were taken to limit the intrusive nature of recording. The camera and recorders were in place each day from the beginning of the term to the end whether they were in use or not so that the students could become comfortable with the equipment as a part of the class setting. Additional data base items in the study included open-ended response sheets, researcher observations and notes, students' written texts, and participant interviews. Response journals in which participants were asked to react to comments made about their writing by group members are included in the data base as well. The journals provided a primary source of descriptive data that helped the researcher cross-validate observations.

Data from the various perspectives were triangulated as suggested by Mathison (1988). Triangulation of data is one means of overcoming weaknesses of one data collection method. By combining interviews, observations, and physical evidence (e.g., writing samples), the researcher can exploit the strengths of each method and discount the weaknesses. Data analysis procedures in the study were a modification of Strauss' (1987) grounded theory analysis, with a methodological impetus toward the development of theory, with no specific commitment to particular kinds of data, lines of research, or theoretical interests. The data were systematically analyzed, compared, and coded with the focus of analysis on organizing the many ideas which emerged from examination of the data. The design of this study precludes any attempt to connect improvement or lack of improvement in student writing to group work. This choice was made because there were other kinds of response in addition to peer response sessions that were a routine part of these classes, making it impossible to determine how peer response sessions alone relate to changes in writing.

RESULTS

Examination of student talk during peer response sessions revealed that the groups differed dramatically in the ways they approached the responsibility of responding to writing. The groups were on-task most of the time, that is, they were engaged in some form of response to writing. The student talk during group sessions, however, demonstrated a wide range among students regarding the roles they assumed during the response process and in their abilities to comment effectively on the writing samples of others. ESL students with limited English proficiency struggled with mechanical concerns such as grammar and syntax, and two or three who lacked good oral and aural English skills resorted to translation dictionaries to help them through the class period. These students had little to say about their peers' writing and, in conference, complained to the instructor that native English speakers talked and read too fast for them to keep up. According to them, they often understoöd little of what transpired during peer response sessions. Ayaka's comment is representative of their frustration:

> "I would like to get a advice in my group member. I also want to know my error in my paper. When I show my paper to my group member, I want to know about their thinking. I know that, how do you think my paper, where is good parts or bad parts and so on, but Jane talk too fast . . . cannot understand some help because it is too fast.."

Reviews of audio- and videotape transcriptions indicated two kinds of student talk during peer response sessions: self-response; and peer-response.

Self-response. Self-response was classified into three subtypes: (1) clarifying for the listener; (2) addressing specific writing problems; and (3) addressing problems with content.

Clarifying for the listener. When clarifying for the listener, the writer interrupts him or herself during reading to explain something about the content or form of the piece being read. He or she may also explain the reason for choosing a topic, the current stage of the written work, or ancillary information surrounding a topic. Whatever the nature of the explanation, it is spontaneous and done in the absence of listener request for information. The following is illustrative:

> Jane *[after reading her essay about communication misunderstandings between men and women]*: "I thought this topic was very interesting because I remember fights between friends of mine--between girlfriend and boyfriend--and you know, I see what it was about."

Addressing specific writing problems. The writer identifies a specific problem in the writing--with form, clarity, unity, cohesion, or mechanics, for example. A writer may indicate a problem by interrupting his or her reading to question peer listeners, seeking help, as Jane did.

> Jane *[after describing how to prepare a special recipe]*: "This part just doesn't sound right." [pause] "What do you think--could you have made it--in the kitchen--made it yourself?"

Addressing problems with content. The writer identifies problems in the draft which have more to do with the content than with specific writing concerns. These problems may be difficulties that result in unintended interpretation of the writer's ideas, or they may be more basic problems with word choice, either with words that obscure meaning, or, as is often the case for ESL students, problems with word meanings and pronunciations. The writers generally address these concerns with direct questions and requests for help from listeners, as did Yasu, in the following vignette:

> Yasu *[reading a paragraph, "Cooking Tofu," comes across a word he cannot pronounce]*: "Uh, I can't talk this . . .*[tries to pronounce the word phonetically]*. "Fi' nel ly."
>
> Jane: "Finally?"
>
> Yasu: "No, no, no." *[makes a gesture with his fingers indicating something very small].*
>
> Jane: "Oh, finely!"
>
> Yasu: "Yes, finely" *[continues reading paragraph]*

Peer Response. Content analysis of audio- and videotapes classified peer responses into two

types: (1) teacher initiated (oral directions or prepared forms) and (2) spontaneous (unrelated to teacher directions).

Teacher initiated response. Peer response sessions were sometimes guided by teacher-prepared mimeographed forms and at other times by the teacher's oral instructions. When prepared forms were used, groups were less likely to stray off task. However, at such times, students' responses were led more by the instructor-prepared forms than by any sense of interaction with the writing. Moreover, students often filled out the forms collaboratively, avoiding evaluation. In some cases, students simply refused to address the evaluation altogether, leaving sections of the forms blank or answering in ways that might have been less than truthful, but that tended to preserve relationships with peers, as happened with Jane:

> Jane *[reading evaluation form aloud after listening to Ayaka's paper]*: " 'Was the introduction clear?' -- So you'd understand what was being explained?" *(Yasu laughs).*
>
> Jane: "So put down 'Yes.'

On other occasions, the reluctance to be evaluative was evidenced in the word choices made by peers as they filled out response forms. They often avoided confrontation by referring to the writer in the third person; rarely did they address the writer directly, by referring to him or her as "you."

While response forms helped keep students on task, organizing how readers and writers spent group time and influencing what specific aspects of the writing were given attention, students were clearly uncomfortable confronting a peer with any criticism of the peer's writing. Moreover, listeners may avoid evaluation because writers often become defensive regarding evaluation of their work. Andrew's journal entry illustrates the dilemma.

> "I don't really care for 'proof reading' others' papers. It calls for me to act superior to my peer and correct mistakes or change a style that is unknown to me. . . most people are too scared to correct another writer's paper for fear of upsetting them . . ."

At the same time, most inexperienced writers registered uncertainty about what it is they need from peer reader/listeners to improve their papers. When they do have questions for their peers, however, writers rarely go beyond the basics of clarity and mechanical correctness. What they want to know is, "Did I do it right?"

When oral instructions were given, groups often did not follow the directions, resulting in few, or no comments pertaining to the writing, as illustrated by the following example when listeners

were asked to note places where the writer needed to fill in details to create a richer image:

Juan's paper is about a storm. It is entitled "The Nightmare." He reads uninterrupted.

Andrew: "You left out 'the' about five times, man-- 'nobody cared about weather; somebody cared about economy, and somebody cared about soccer game.' The weather, the economy, the soccer game."

Juan: "I know. I just get writing too fast sometimes, you know. Where's your paper?"

Andrew: "I'm not finished." *(He laughs)* ".. I had to go to cheerleading camp last night."

The group members laugh. This is an inside joke, because there are about 200 high school girls on campus attending a cheerleading clinic. Furthermore, Andrew is a University cheerleader, which both legitimizes and gives a double meaning to his comment. The group has found a welcome distraction, and the conversation strays away from writing tasks to the high school girls on campus. Finally, someone shuts off the tape recorder.

Spontaneous peer response. Even when students used teacher-prepared forms to guide response, there were instances of response unrelated to questions on the forms. By far, concerns over mechanical and grammatical correctness dominated these conversations. Students apply "rules" to their writing and express concern with mechanics over content. L_1 and ESL students alike put mechanics high on their lists of concerns as journal entries illustrate:

1. Jane: "The things I want to know [from peers] were if the paper was clear all the way through and if there were any mechanical errors."
2. Tomonori: "I'd like to have helps [from peers] like to tell me a correct grammer [sic], correct paragraph, what kinds of words I suppose to use."

However, ESL students overgeneralize rules and apply them rigidly in an attempt to make their writing hypercorrect. During an interview, Ayaka was asked about her paper entitled "Japanese Funeral Manners." Her draft was written in the second person, instructing the reader in the proper etiquette for attending a Japanese funeral. Yet, her revised paper revealed that she had changed it throughout so that it would read, "one should."

"When one arrives at the funeral hall, one should say words of condolence to the receptionist and give him or her a monetary offering for the departed soul. After that one should sign one's name on the participant list."

According to Ayaka, the reason she changed the second person "you" to "one" was that an L_1 peer told her the rule of not using "you" in academic writing. Sometimes, "rules" employed by writers are part of the grammar of English; on other occasions, however, the "rules" are inappropriate. At the same time, L_1 writers convey to L_2 peers that mechanical correctness has priority by rarely focusing on content matters. Further, ESL students are often "left out" when the heart of the discussion is content. L_1 students assume that L_2s will not understand the use of culturally specific terms, as is the case with Jane, and at other times, L_1s do not want to take the time to explain the vernacular to their L_2 peers, as demonstrated by Andrew, in the following vignettes:

1. In an interview, Jane reported that she tries to be patient with ESL students and says that she sees her role in class as helpful to ESL peers but does not feel that they can be helpful to her. This brought up an incident with a short paper she did in which she described the preparation of a special potato dish. The paper she handed in ended with *"Bon appetit!"* Yet, the audiotape does not reveal that ending when she and her group discussed the paper. When I asked about this, Jane explained that she did not think the Japanese students would "get it"--the intended inference of the Julia Child TV show-- so she just skipped over it.
2. During a peer response session, Jane, Jennifer, and Andrew laughed about a reference Jane made in her paper about setting off a smoke alarm in T. J. Maxx. Kenji was quizzical and first questioned "alarmed? frightened?" Andrew explained that Jane was referring to the little red box on the wall that made noise when something was on fire. Then, Kenji further queried, "What is Maxx?" Andrew explained that this was a department store, "like Goldsmith's" and that Jane had set off the fire alarm. When Kenji did not laugh, Andrew remarked in a flippant tone, "You had to be there."

Native English speakers assume that L_2 students will not understand language nuances, slang or colloquialisms, and in fact, they frequently do not. Consequently, L_1 students become condescending or simply choose not to deal with these kinds of content issues.

Content concerns. Although mechanics dominated response, when response to content did occur, it was often the most dynamic conversation surrounding a piece of writing. While some exchanges seemed off task, they nonetheless involved listeners in the content of others' writing in several ways. Sometimes listeners reacted by laughing in appropriate places, or by giving positive but vague commentary (uh-huh; yeah). Further, through these kinds of exchanges, as evidenced by

the following example, responders supported writers by showing interest in their peer's written product.

Kenji *[reading a descriptive essay about his older sister]*: "Sometimes she is a sensitive girl. For example, she likes to write poems. She cries at a good movie. But on the other hand, she likes to beat me up, and she likes to hear hard rock music."

Jack: "Yeah?--Like, what does she do when she beat you up? Does she win?"

Kenji: "Yeah." *(The group laughs).*

Jennifer: "I'll bet she's smaller than you, isn't she?"

Kenji: "Yes, but she's strong." *(The group laughs again).*

Jack: *(in a funny voice)* "But she's strong." *(In response, Kenji kicks Jack good naturedly, and the group laughs.)*

Peer response to content serves several important purposes. For ESL writers, these exchanges lead to English vocabulary expansion. Also, while it does not necessarily help writers discover problems or solutions to problems, content-focused talk is usually supportive to writers and often leads writers to clarify ideas. Further, content-focused conversations have the most potential for building community among group members.

In summary, several patterns were identified among the groups in this study as they talked about their writing in peer response groups. When reading their work aloud, students offer self-evaluations. They try to clarify meaning and intent for the listener, and even when specific direction for response is provided by the teacher, writers help peers fill out response sheets by offering evaluation and insight into their writing for the reader/listener.

Preferring to preserve relationships with classmates over addressing problems in a peer's writing, students often avoid less than flattering evaluation of a peer's writing. Further,the behaviors of inexperienced writers indicate that they are unsure of their role in the response process and are uncertain how to stand apart from their own writing to consider alternatives suggested by their peers. As a result of these difficulties, most writers are unable to decide what kind of assistance they need from their peers beyond mechanics, grammar, and basic correctness. ESL writers are particularly beset by these issues.

The process of becoming independent critics of their own writing is slow for native speakers, but it poses additional problems for ESL students. They struggle with a host of problems in order

to clarify meaning, and they focus on mechanical concerns over content. In addition, L_1 students often lose patience with their L_2 peers' lack of understanding. Yet, some occasions emerged when spontaneous response to content occurred in a peer response session. At those times peers showed interest in each other's writing and functioned more as a supportive community, highlighting the potential of promoting positive intergroup relations through cooperative learning tools such as peer response groups.

Revising Writing

Students in this study indicate in their journals that they like getting ideas from their peers in response groups. Nonetheless, even among students who view peer response as positive, there was discomfort with the role of critic. Students do not enjoy evaluating one another's writing. Yet, as writers they revised their writing in ways mirroring comments received from their peers.

Students make decisions to revise or not to revise, based upon peer response, for a variety of reasons. Indeed, students themselves are often unable to identify how they come to these decisions as the following interview suggests:

Carlos: "Sometimes I don't know if I did a good job or not cause I say, 'Oh I did a good job' and then I miss things that I think they're right but actually I did wrong cause I put like--"

Teacher: "What kinds of things would you think were right and it turns out that they weren't?"

Carlos: "Punctuation--like sometimes I put many commas. . . Grammar maybe, you know, some words that I, maybe know the meaning, but that's not what it really means."

Teacher: "So maybe you're using the wrong words sometimes?"

Carlos: "Yeah, maybe"

Teacher: "Ok--how do you discover that? Does somebody in the group tell you that?"

Carlos: "No, usually they don't tell you--I just notice by myself . . . Or even if I'm writing a paper by myself I use a dictionary and a thesaurus and I try to find out but sometimes I'm writing and I use one word [too often]."

Teacher: "When somebody in your group makes a suggestion, do you take their advice or not?"

Carlos: "Yeah, I take their advice."

Teacher: "What do you do to your writing, for example, when you take their advice?"

Carlos: "I guess--if I think they're right, but if I think they're wrong--I listen to them but then I think twice [about] if they're right or not."

Teacher: So, in the end, would you say that you make your own decision?"

Carlos: "Yeah"

In other instances, students poll peers for response and then reject that response, making editorial judgments about peer accuracy, as suggested in this researcher observational journal entry:

> In one group session, Jack provided advice to Kenji regarding the use of who vs. whom. Jack claimed that Kenji's sentence, "She is a woman whom I respect" should read, "She is a woman who I respect." Kenji asked Tomonori, another group member, if he should use 'who' or 'whom.' Tomonori disagreed with Jack; He also believed "whom" to be correct. Jack responded, "I like who better--whom sounds dumb--I don't know anybody around here who'd say 'whom'." Kenji revised his paper, but did not change the 'whom.' When I asked Kenji several days later how he decided which word to use, since Jack had told him that 'whom' was incorrect, Kenji's response was "He's idiot."

Examination of revisions indicates that writers make changes in their papers that correspond to suggestions made by peers. But, writers do not have a clear sense of what prompts them to accept or reject a peer's suggestion. Some choices by writers to reject response stem from resentment when writers perceive that their efforts are unappreciated by the peer audience, as Kenji admitted:

> "I dislike [receiving peer response to my writing] when they said you did a poor job and when they didn't think anything about my paper. I like [receiving peer response] when they were impressed from my writing."

Phrasing may affect writers' willingness to embrace peer suggestions. Self-assured writers resent advice if it is harsh and ignore peer recommendations, good or bad. Still other rejections come from the writers' inability to detach themselves from their work and imagine alternatives to what they've written. But on other occasions, writers are forced to consider peer views and then make educated guesses regarding revisions based upon their own knowledge or experience. One problem ESL writers face is that much of what they receive are random responses which often miss the areas where the writers need help. In addition, writers sometimes receive conflicting advice. For inexperienced ESL writers, the consequences of such occurrences are that they try to incorporate all the advice they receive, as in Ayaka's "Funeral Manners" essay, since they lack the confidence and the skills to judge the value of the peer advice or the way it conforms to their intentions for their writing.

The Dilemma of the Teacher/Researcher

The primary goal of the researcher is to learn through investigation. The aim of the teacher is to bring others to understand (Wong, 1995). Given that the goals of teaching and researching are different, when teacher becomes researcher, conflicts arise, posing ethical and logistical dilemmas for those engaged in classroom research.

There were times during this study that the teacher became at odds with the researcher; that is, there seemed to be a conflict of purpose. As researcher, one's duty is to observe carefully, to reflect, to inquire. But, for the teacher, the need sometimes arose to abandon the research in order to take action, to do the right thing, to instruct, to change the students' notions about what they were thinking. Even when the logistical conflict of purpose (to teach or to research) was solved and "observing" rather than "teaching" was the choice, the role of teacher could not be neglected.

An Example of the Teacher/Researcher Struggle

I pull up a chair and situate it just outside the circle the students have made with their desks. They have revised their essays, having workshopped them earlier in small groups. Now they would present their revisions to the whole class for response. I have a notepad in front of me so that I can take notes on the interaction of the peer-response group.

Kaneko is first. He has worked diligently on his topic, "Views of Mankind: A Comparison of the Philosophies of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard." He clears his voice and begins.

Unfortunately, from nearly the moment Kaneko begins to read, I realize that I--and the class as well--have absolutely no idea what anything he is saying means. Not only is the topic complex, but his pronunciations of many of the words are unrecognizable. Nonetheless, he reads on, and when he is finished, I smile weakly as we make eye contact. Kaneko sits upright and proud, hands folded, a satisfied smile on his face. Not knowing quite what to say, I look around at the rest of the class. All eyes are aimed in my direction. The students are silent, waiting expectantly for me to say something.

"Okaaay, Kaneko," I acknowledge hesitantly. "That's awfully deep-- Does anyone have anything to say about Kaneko's paper?" I am met with silence. A student coughs nervously. Another student looks out the window. I continue. "It's very difficult when we try to follow along with something this complicated and just listen--It's difficult to comment appropriately about the

things we find good and the things we find confusing because the subject matter alone is confusing to most of us." I look at the class and direct my comments to them. "Is it confusing to you? Or am I the only one who doesn't know the difference between Kierkegaard's philosophy and Nietzsche's? I feel like I'm lucky to pronounce their names--not being a philosophy person." I begin to wonder how I can move this discussion (or non-discussion) along.

"I did hear a couple of pronoun-antecedent problems." Here, I segue into a short grammar lesson on pronoun-antecedent agreement, mostly for lack of anything else to say. I feel uneasy about focusing on grammar, especially since I emphasize that these things can be fixed in editing.

The students look like they are losing interest. I go back to my seat at the edge of the circle. A few moments pass as I wait for someone--anyone--to comment.

"I like your title," I mention. Another moment passes. Frustrated and tense, I can't think of anything else to say. The smile has disappeared from Kaneko's face, and the other students look at their own papers, avoiding Kaneko's eyes and mine.

Addressing the Situation. If nothing else, the events of that day highlighted Freedman's (1987) claim that as much can go wrong as goes right in peer response sessions. It was apparent to me that having ESL writers read their papers for peer response would not work in this class. Furthermore, my role as teacher had collided with my role as researcher. Clearly, the classroom culture had to be changed in order to renegotiate rules, roles, and expectations, so that, for one, I could become part of the peer response group, in order for teacher response to be perceived as a normal part of the peer response experience. Changes in the classroom cannot simply be mandated by the teacher, however, and be successful. They must necessarily be entered into by both parties in order not to dash the student expectations that had already become established in this class. Drawing on Freedman, Dyson, Flower, and Chafe's (1987) argument for an integrative approach to studying writing that goes beyond skill acquisition and includes a discourse with its own rules and expectations, I began to sit in on small group sessions, for brief periods of time, and then engaged in whole class response sessions as a matter of routine. For this particular class, whole group discussions were not intractable since the class itself was small. In this kind of classroom culture with its expanded sense of writing as a product and process within its social context, teaching and researching could productively coexist.

Furthermore, although I want writers to "hear" their own writing and, so, ask students to read

their papers aloud to the group, since listening to Kaneko's presentation, I have become ill at ease with oral presentation alone. I now insist that students bring copies of papers for group members. They continue to read aloud, but they reinforce their reading with a hard copy of the text. Examination of the video- and audiotape transcripts affirmed my judgment that students are better able to respond to peers' work, particularly ESL peers, when they have copies of group members' texts to follow as papers are read aloud. In one peer response session, Ayaka read an essay about her mother. Her pronunciation was so weak, however, it was doubtful that anyone understood her. None of the other students commented, even when asked questions by the teacher to elicit feedback. In contrast, the same student received richer feedback from her group when she supplied a copy of her essay during a different response session, as illustrated by the following:

Ayaka begins to read a paper about a TV sitcom. She stumbles over a word.

Jane: "swelled." *(After assisting in the pronunciation, Jane points to another word.)*

Jane: "On this, you have 'much,' not 'match'--It was a boxing match--m-a-t-c-h." She points to yet another spot. "And this sentence here . . . it isn't a sentence . . "The game between the small thin guy and big muscular guy." That's not a sentence--you don't have a verb after that--it's not a sentence."

Ayaka finishes reading her paper.

Jane: "Do you know the name of the guys? Do you know the name of the big guy and the little guy?-- You just want to make sure that you're clear [to the reader]. On this sentence right here-- 'They beat a lot of time each other not too easy'-- that sentence-- It might be ok to keep that sentence, but it needs some work, so you might work on that sentence somehow-- and the part underneath that-- you don't need it [for clarity]."

It is important to ESL students' growth as writers that the meaning of their compositions not be unnecessarily obfuscated. It is further important to have opportunities for practicing oral use of the language on a native speaking audience. Ayaka recognizes this need with this journal comment:

> "I'm Japanese so my English pronounse [pronunciation] is very bad. I want to know correct [pronunciation]. American students correct my [pronunciation]."

ESL students benefited in another way from the introduction of manuscript copies to the response process. Early in the term it was apparent that some ESL students were having problems understanding what was going on, as this researcher observational note indicates:

"In group 2 Ayaka is acting as a translator. She tells Yasu in Japanese what Jane has said. Yasu has a translation dictionary open, but he cannot seem to keep up with the group."

For ESL students, providing text copies to group members afforded a vehicle for clear presentation of their ideas. Additionally, although using manuscript copies did not cause the translation dictionaries to go away, there was less need for translation when students had a copies of the texts.

DISCUSSION

While there seem to be many reasons to use peer response groups in writing classes, much can and often does go wrong, subverting teachers' well-intended pedagogical goals at every juncture. On the positive side, response groups in this study helped students respond to their own writing as they sensed audience needs. Examination of the data shows that students talked to explore and enlarge understanding of their own writing. Like students in Danis' (1982) and Nystrand's (1986) studies, students in this study developed meaning as they talked in their groups, recognizing trouble areas in their writing without peer help. This anticipation of audience needs for clarification was apparent for L_2 as well as L_1 writers. In the context of the peer response groups, student writing is redefined in terms of audience. Theoretically, response groups support process instruction methods by extending the audience for student writing beyond the teacher, thereby establishing a context for student papers that recognizes the rhetorical function of student writing. In contrast to traditional classrooms, where writing is a "silent and solitary activity" (Emig, 1979), response groups extend the value of a student paper beyond the academic by creating an alternative audience. While audience importance for L_1 writers has been discussed often in the writing field, its role for ESL writers has been virtually neglected. The data in this study illustrate that ESL writers can benefit from expanded audiences by developing response patterns similar to those of experienced L_1 writers, broadening audience awareness in attempts to clarify and amplify meaning.

The use of peer response groups, however, is not without obstacles. The data in this study reveal limitations similar to those noted by Danis (1982), George (1984), Newkirk (1984), and Freedman (1987): students' reluctance to offer negative criticism; the tendency for students to drift away from appropriate tasks; the possibility of their falling prey to inaccurate or bad advice; the exaggerated emphasis on mechanics over content; and the overlooking of problems in the papers.

Students, especially those new to response groups, are not very good at responding to the writing of their peers. When students ask for help from their response groups, the groups rarely provide the kind of help students want. Further, students prefer to avoid evaluative talk and resist appraising peers' writing. They do not like playing the role perceived to belong to the teacher.

Inexperienced writers presenting their work to response groups are often uncertain of their role in the peer-response process. In addition, they are unsure how to stand outside their own writing in order to view alternatives, offered by their peers, to their work. As a result of the difficulty in detaching themselves from their composing, writers have a limited idea of what it is they want to know from peers about their own papers beyond the basic questions of clarity and mechanical correctness. This is especially true for ESL writers whose struggles with the basic questions obscure the deeper quest for developing meaningful communication.

The peer response process in this study was further complicated when student writers disregarded their peers as valid audiences and, consequently, as valid critics. Britton (1975) purports that lack of experience with alternative audiences makes it difficult for such students to elicit criticism from these alternative audiences. The students in this study were together for only ten weeks and may have been uncomfortable with the social dynamics of the peer response groups, thus limiting their willingness to take an evaluative stance with a peer's work. Harris (1992) notes that groups become more proficient at responding as they practice response over and over and learn how to function as a group. Similarly, from my teaching experience with L_1 response groups, as students practice using peer-group techniques and gain more skill in peer response, they become more comfortable with the process and thereby more willing to recognize the validity of the peer audience. The data from this study only highlights the importance of time in developing peer response groups in the classroom. Time is both the friend and the enemy of peer response: In the short summer sessions of this study, there was not enough time for groups to function at their best level. Yet, given extended periods of time, peer response groups can and do develop confidence and trust in one another that enable them to develop into discourse communities.

The data raise many questions about authority, rules, roles, and relationships that must be addressed if response groups are to function effectively in linguistically diverse classrooms. In this study, the issue of appropriate roles prompted the question, where does the teacher fit into the writing process when emphasis is placed on peer response? The use of response groups does not

preclude teacher input, but it does change the nature of the input. For students in this study, teacher-generated response forms were helpful in keeping students focused on the writing and provided students with opportunities to reflect on their work, even when they filled out response forms collaboratively. Yet, the issue of authority roles remains unresolved when teacher-mandated concerns drive peer response.

More than anything, this study illustrates how much we do not know about the use of peer response in multilingual classrooms. While peer response groups will function differently from classroom to classroom, detailed field based studies of how groups function in different settings can be beneficial to depict what is important in setting up response groups in practice.

Research Directions

An important implication of this study is unmistakable: while writing groups may be a valuable instructional tool for ESL writers, helping them sustain the writing process and develop audience awareness, it is clear that little is known about how peer response groups can be used most effectually in bilingual or multilingual classrooms. Whereas some strategies used in L_1 classrooms transfer effectively to the multilingual setting, others do not. For example, instruction following the tradition of Macrorie (1979) that provides minimal guidance to groups, or the "teacherless writing groups" as described by Elbow (1973) with which many L_1 teachers are most familiar, have certain limitations for use in a multilingual setting because of their dependence on peer listeners who have no copy of the manuscript. For L_1 listeners in the multilingual setting of this study, this peer response strategy did not work because L_1 students could not understand the pronunciations of ESL writers without help from a copy of the text. Furthermore, ESL students also needed the support of hard copies of L_1 peers' texts to reinforce the spoken words with the printed words when their peers read. L_1 students are not the only ones who do not understand the pronunciations of some words.

Although the data from this research suggest that response groups do influence revision and that students revise their writing in ways that mirror peer suggestions, there is still much to be learned about the extent of these revisions and the degree of improvement made in student papers after meetings with response groups. For teachers, one of the major considerations about peer response groups is whether or not they actually lead to improvement in student writing. Thus, the questions

arise: Do ESL students, by responding to peers' writing, acquire a strong sense of "good" writing, and how does this affect their performance as writers? Future research should compare bilingual and multilingual classes using response groups with those that do not. Additional research should use evaluative criteria to analyze data for the extent of improvement in student papers subsequent to meetings of peer response groups.

As propounded by Freedman, Dyson, Flower, and Chafe (1987), learning to write is not simply skill acquisition, but the entrance into discourse communities with their own rules and expectations. Longitudinal data on peer response groups could provide important information on how relationships are affected and how the language of a given group changes over time.

The strong theoretical rationale for the use of peer response groups and their increasingly widespread use in both ESL and multilingual settings coupled with conflicting research data create an agenda of necessity for better understanding the potential for peer response groups in the teaching and learning of writing.

Postscript

In her final journal entry, Jane, who early in the summer had indicated that she tried to be patient and help ESL students but did not think they would be helpful to her, wrote:

> "I liked receiving the advice [from my group]. I do wish we could have done . . . more of it. I was also glad for the opportunity to know others in the class who are from a different background. It was interesting to me to learn some things about their culture."

Slavin (1991) cites several cooperative learning studies illustrating that students involved in cooperative learning groups named, several months after the end of the studies, more friends outside their own ethnic groups than did students in the control groups. Peer response groups promote positive intergroup relations by affording both L_1 and L_2 students a chance to become acquainted with students of different cultural or ethnic groups. For ESL students, such positive interethnic and intercultural relationships have an added value. For those students in the process of new language acquisition, peer response groups in a bilingual or multilingual context offer an occasion to practice their new language in writing as well as orally and aurally, with native speaking peers, practice that is critical to their becoming not simply second language acquirers, but second language users.

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